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Theatrical Scenic Design: Creating and Presenting a Professional Portfolio

As a theatre design student interested in pursuing scenic design, I completed an honors project that focuses around the full process of completing a set design and portfolio presentation. I designed and built a set for the show Body Awareness produced by fellow students at URI Theatre in April 2017. I was nominated to attend the Kennedy Center for the American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) February 2018 to present my work to numerous theatrical respondents at a regional conference.

With the help of my advisor, I re-drafted my design and created a finished portfolio piece out of the process. Last spring when the show took place, my attention was completely occupied by the need to reach strict deadlines and build the actual set. As a result, my drafting and designs themselves were rushed. In preparing for the festival, I will completely re-do all of my previous work and improve upon it under less time-crunching circumstances.

The learning outcomes I achieved revolved around the process of improving and reforming my past work. Theatre is a fast-paced industry, and artists are often trapped in the cycle of creating a design, having it created on stage, and never visiting it again once the show has finished. Through completing my honors project I learned how to revisit my own work from an entirely critical perspective, to present my work in a professional setting in an accessible format, and to think on my feet when thrown a “curveball”.

Initially all student presenters were told they would have three to four minutes to present their designs for a minute of feedback. However upon setting up my exhibit, we were all told that our presentations could only be one minute long, with the remaining four minutes used for feedback. I spent the night revising my presentation to fit these parameters. In the end, I did not proceed to the next round of respondent sessions. I was disappointed at first, but understood that competing against upwards of 50 students and attempting to explain my entire artistic process to complete strangers in 60 seconds was an accomplishment in itself. Overall the entire experience was a great learning process, and was receiving their critique and feedback was remarkably helpful to my development as an aspiring scenic artist.